

# Dissolved Oxygen in Lake Whatcom

## Trend in the Depletion of Hypolimnetic Oxygen in Basin I 1983-1997

### Abstract

Available data for dissolved oxygen in Basin I of Lake Whatcom was reviewed. The rate of depletion of dissolved oxygen in the hypolimnion was examined for 1983-1997. The hypolimnetic oxygen depletion rates were calculated for the June through mid-August periods of stratification for each year using volume-weighted average concentrations of dissolved oxygen.

The hypolimnetic oxygen depletion rates in Basin I appear to be significantly increasing during the period of 1983-97. The current rates in Basin I are in the typical range for mesotrophic lakes. However, the increasing trend suggests that trophic state of Basin I may soon shift to a more eutrophic condition based on criteria suggested by Welch and Wetzel.

### Introduction

Oxygen depletion in the bottom waters (hypolimnion) of Basins I and II of Lake Whatcom (Figure 1) has been well documented during the period of stratification (URS, 1985; Walker, Matthews, and Matthews, 1992; Matthews and Matthews, 1993, 1994, 1995; Matthews, Hilles, and Matthews, 1996 and 1997). The analyses to date have not included determination of hypolimnetic oxygen deficit rates (HODR) based on volume-weighted average concentrations of dissolved oxygen in the hypolimnion as recommended by standard textbooks for limnological analyses (*e.g.* Wetzel and Likens, 1991).

Dissolved oxygen is consumed during the decomposition of organic matter, which is deposited in the sediments of a lake. During the summer months the surface water (epilimnion) of the lake is heated and becomes less dense than the deeper, cooler water of the hypolimnion. The hypolimnion becomes blocked from a supply of oxygen. Dissolved oxygen in the hypolimnion decreases until the fall when the surface cools and mixes again with the deeper water in the lake.

At low dissolved oxygen concentrations, phosphorus, usually the most limiting nutrient for growth of algae, is released from the sediment into the water (Cooke *et al.*, 1986.) As summer progresses, nutrients in the hypolimnion increase in concentration and may be mixed into the lighted, warm epilimnion where they stimulate growth of algae in the process called internal nutrient loading. Desirable fish such as salmonids that prefer the cold water of the hypolimnion may be excluded from the lake due to low oxygen.

### Previous Evaluations of Trends in Water Quality in Basin I

Historical data show that the hypolimnion of Basin I has had low dissolved oxygen conditions for at least the past 30 years. Matthews, Hilles, and Matthews (1997) reported a trend of decreasing

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concentrations of dissolved oxygen at the 10-meter depth during September of 1987-97. The reports by Matthews *et al* have also suggested increasing trends in ammonia and dissolved phosphorus in the hypolimnion with the increasing extent of anoxia.

Adolfson (1997) reported that total phosphorus and chlorophyll in the epilimnion did not exhibit significant increasing trends in Basin I. Adolfson (1997) also estimated HODR using arithmetic means of dissolved oxygen in the hypolimnion at the beginning and ending of the stratification season and reported that there was not evidence of an increasing trend. Adolfson (1997) acknowledged that the use of volume-weighted average concentrations of dissolved oxygen would have provided a more accurate estimate of HODR, but this was not done during their study.

## Criteria for HODR

Criteria for HODR in relation to trophic state were reported by Mortimer and summarized by Welch (1980) and Wetzel (1983) as follows:

Oligotrophic < 250 mg/m<sup>2</sup>/day  
Eutrophic > 550 mg/m<sup>2</sup>/day

The HODR is defined as the rate of depletion of hypolimnetic dissolved oxygen per unit time per unit of surface area of the hypolimnion. The overall observation time should be at least a month, and preferably longer, during the period of stratification (Welch, 1980).

## Depth-Volume Relationships for Basin I

The bathymetric map of Lake Whatcom is shown in Figure 1. The areas of the 0, 5, 10, 15, and 25-meter depth contours in Basin I were determined to develop a relationship between depth and volume in the lake (Figure 2) using the procedure described by Wetzel and Likens (1991). The volumes of horizontal slices of the lake with discrete depths were estimated based on the interpolated depth-volume relationship.

The relative volumes of the discrete slices in the hypolimnion were used to assign volume-weighting factors for sampling data. For example, the 9.5-10.5 meter depth interval of the lake represents approximately 18 percent of the total volume below 9.5 meters, therefore the sample from a depth of 10 meters was assigned a volume weighting factor of 0.18 to calculate a volume-weighted average for hypolimnetic dissolved oxygen, if measurements were made at 1 meter intervals. Volume-weighted averages are widely recognized in limnology as the most representative estimate of the mass of oxygen in the water column of a lake (*e.g.* Wetzel, 1983).

## Trend in HODR Between 1983-97

The volume-weighted average concentration of dissolved oxygen in the hypolimnion steadily decreases during the period of stratification (Figure 3). The rate of decrease is defined as the HODR (Wetzel, 1983), which can be expressed either as a rate of change in concentration (*e.g.* mg/L/day) or rate of consumption per unit area of the hypolimnion (*e.g.* mg/m<sup>2</sup>/day). The rate of consumption per unit area is estimated by multiplying the rate of change in concentration (volume-weighted average) by the volume of the hypolimnion (hypolimnetic volume is  $4.7 \times 10^6$  m<sup>3</sup> from 9.5 meters to the bottom) to obtain the

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rate of change in mass, and then dividing by the area of the hypolimnion ( $0.92 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^2$  for the 9.5 meter depth contour).

Dissolved oxygen in the hypolimnion gradually begins to decrease between April and May when thermal stratification develops. Minimum values of hypolimnetic dissolved oxygen occur at different times from year to year depending on when de-stratification of the water column occurs. In general, the HODR is fairly constant between June and mid-August during all years. The HODR was estimated for each year by linear regression of the hypolimnetic dissolved oxygen concentrations between June and mid-August (between June 1 and August 15 of each year). The HODR is equal to the slope of the linear regression equation (Appendix A).

The HODR in Basin I appears to be significantly increasing during the period of 1983-97 (Figure 4). The trend of increasing HODR is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level based on linear regression and non-parametric trend tests (the significance level is  $< 0.05$  based on a t-test for the slope of the linear regression, and for non-parametric Spearman and Pearson correlation tests). Data from 1993 were excluded because the measurements during that year were not sensitive below 2 mg/L. Data from 1985-87 were excluded because they were not as complete or reliable due to changes in methods (personal communication with William McCourt, City of Bellingham, Department of Public Works).

The current levels of HODR in Basin I are in the typical range for mesotrophic lakes. However, the trend in HODR suggests that the trophic state of Basin I may soon shift to a more eutrophic condition based on criteria for HODR suggested by Welch (1980).

Changes in the HODR are an indicator of eutrophication (Wetzel, 1983). Increases in HODR are usually caused by increases in production of algae, which is caused by increased loading of nutrients. Changes in the loading of organic material may also cause changes in HODR. Changes in the land use and pollution controls in the watershed are usually the cause of changes in loading of nutrients and organic material to a lake.

The following summary by Wetzel (1983) is relevant to the use of HODR for detecting trends in Lake Whatcom and other lakes:

*"... when detailed data on productivity are lacking, the oxygen deficit can be informative about the general trophic status of the lake. Changes in hypolimnetic oxygen deficit rates over long periods of time can be indicative of overall changes in the productivity of the lake... The trend (of increases in HODR in Douglas Lake in Michigan for example) reflects an accelerated nutrient input and eutrophication associated with human activity first as a result of deforestation, and second as a result of the development of the area for recreational purposes. This pattern has been repeated many times in other lakes, but long-term data are available only rarely. The well-known rapid eutrophication of a much larger lake, Lake Erie, has been followed in a similar way..."*

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## References

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## Contacts

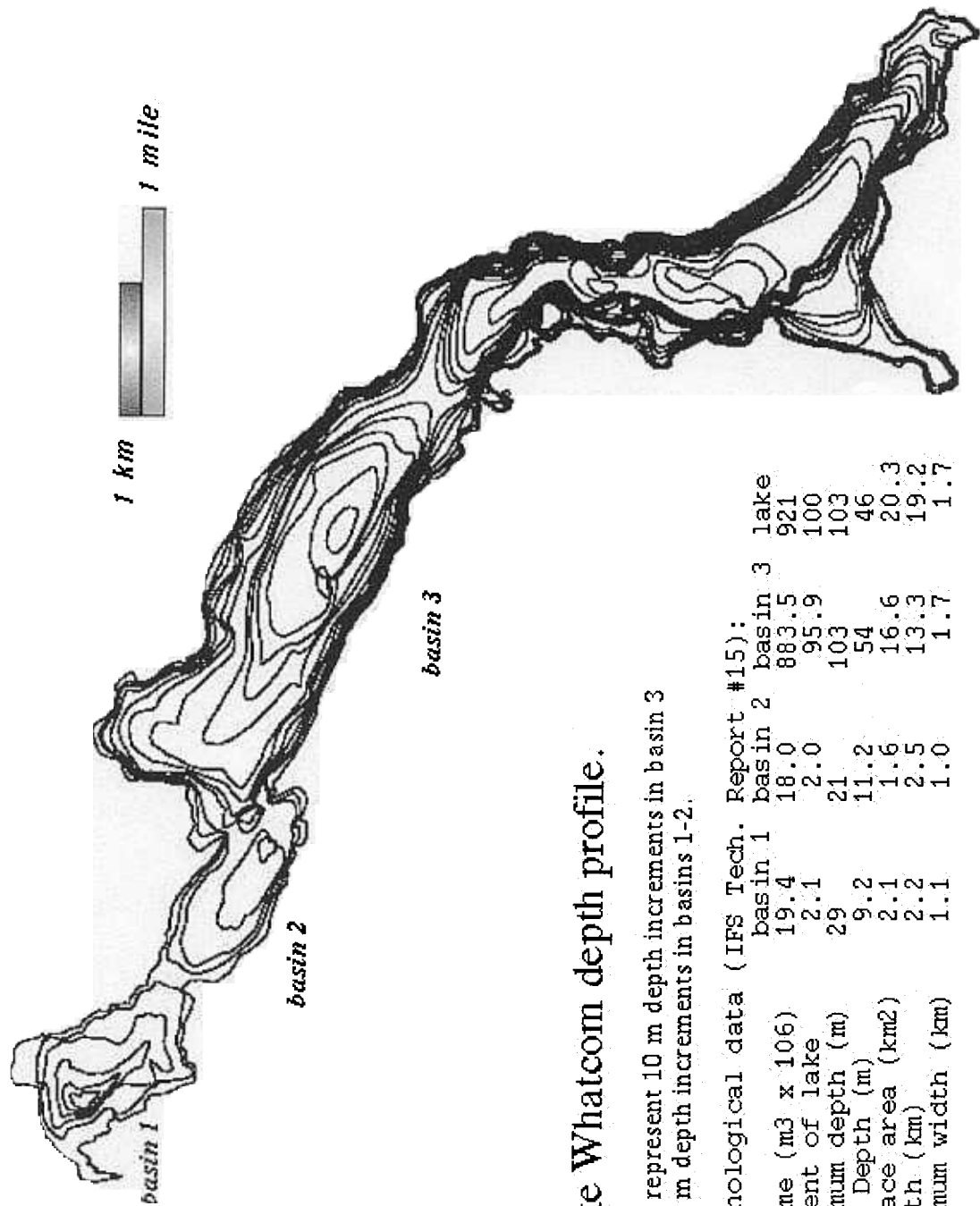
Greg Pelletier      Washington State Department of Ecology  
Environmental Investigations and Laboratory Services  
Watershed Assessments Section  
(360) 407-6485

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Figure 1. Bathymetric map and morphological data for Lake Whatcom.  
(source: [http://sanjuan.cs.wvu.edu/L\\_Whatcom/data/depth.html](http://sanjuan.cs.wvu.edu/L_Whatcom/data/depth.html))

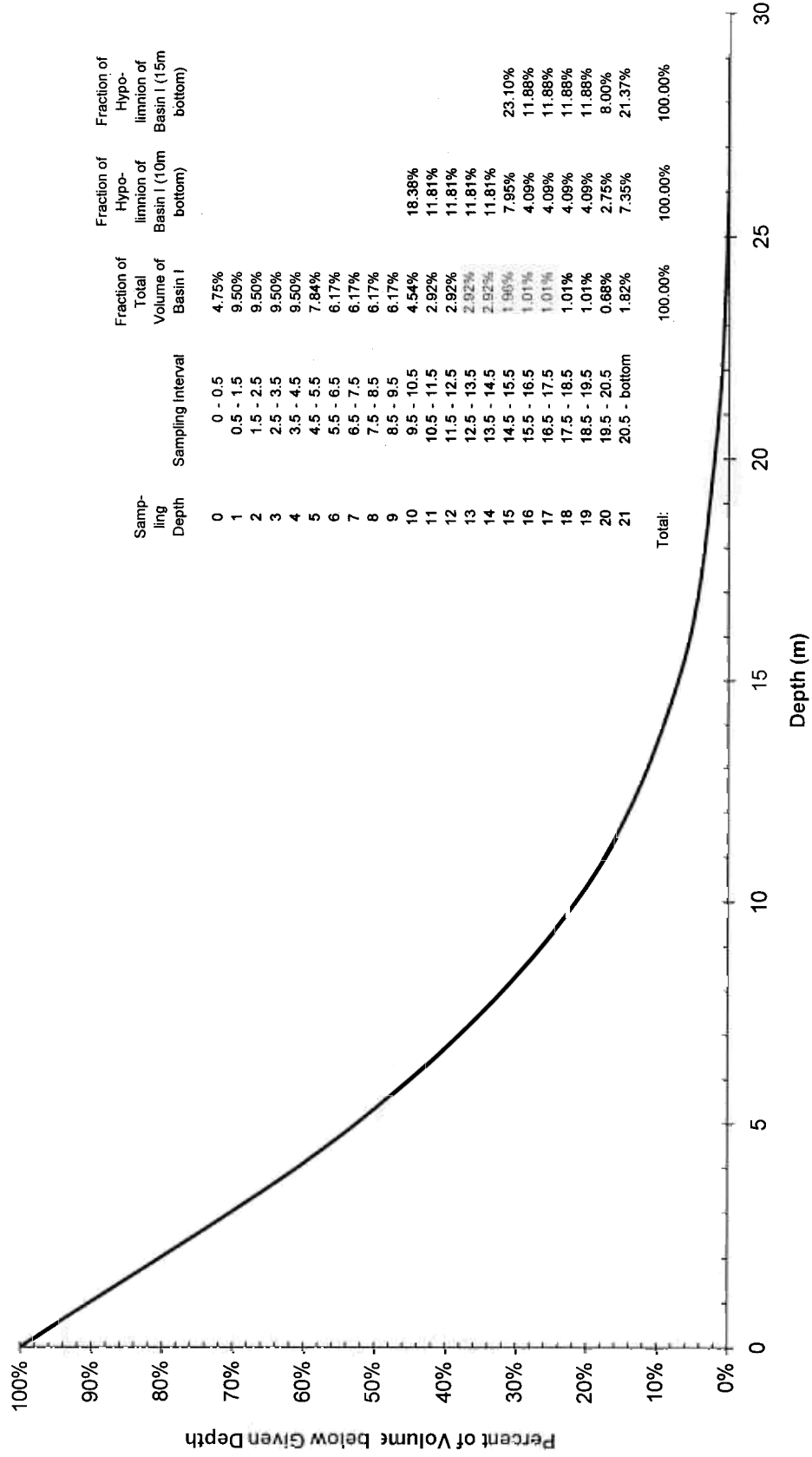


Lake Whatcom depth profile.

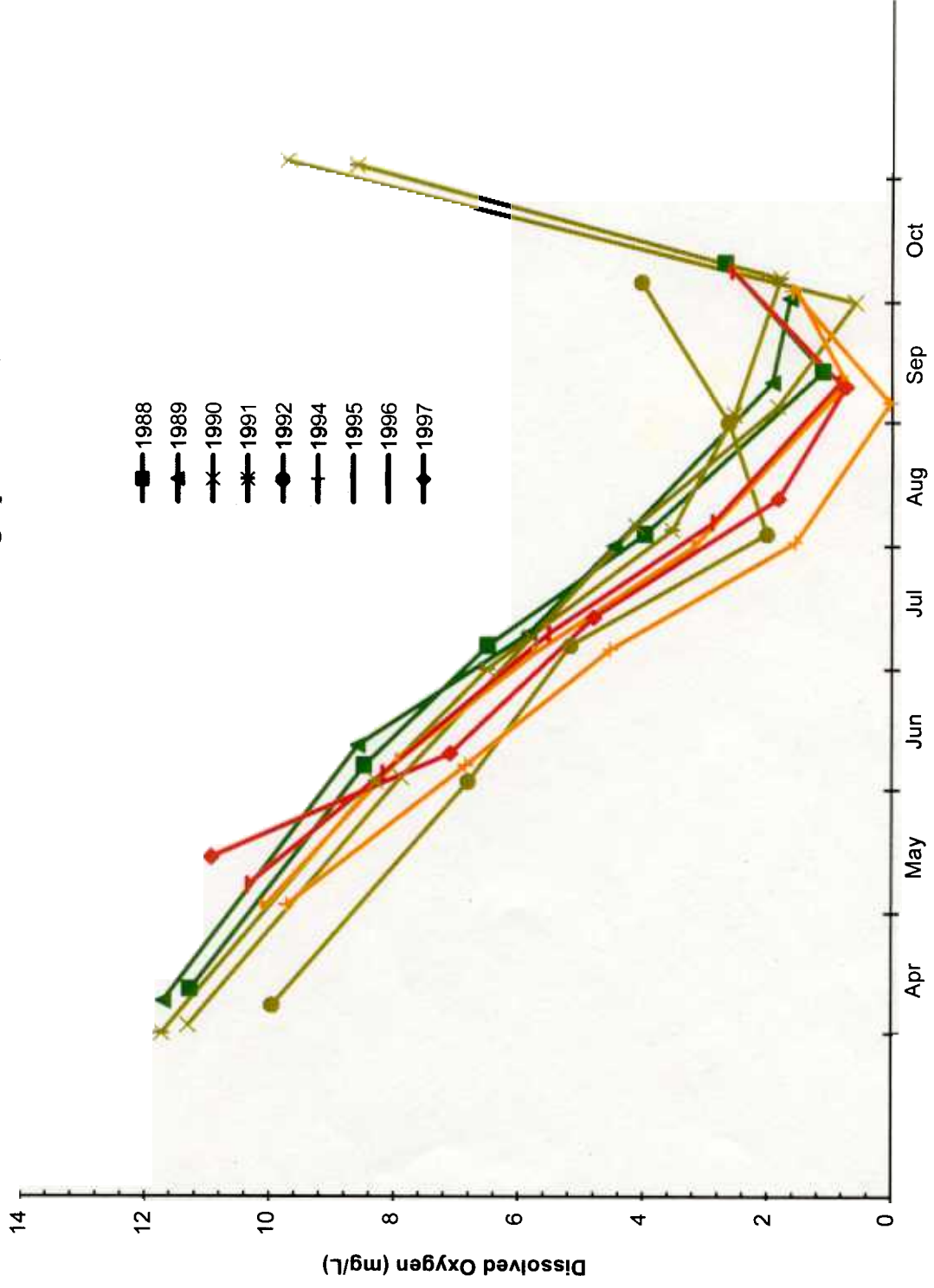
Lines represent 10 m depth increments in basin 3  
and 5 m depth increments in basins 1-2.

Morphological data (IFS Tech. Report #15):				
	basin 1	basin 2	basin 3	lake
Volume (m3 x 106)	19.4	18.0	883.5	921
Percent of lake	2.1	2.0	95.9	100
Maximum depth (m)	29	21	103	103
Mean Depth (m)	9.2	11.2	54	46
Surface area (km2)	2.1	1.6	16.6	20.3
Length (km)	2.2	2.5	13.3	19.2
Maximum width (km)	1.1	1.0	1.7	1.7

Figure 2. Depth-volume relationship for basin I of Lake Whatcom.



**Figure 3. Volume-weighted hypolimnetic DO (10m-bottom) in Basin I of Lake Whatcom during April-October, 1988-97.**





# Appendix A (continued).

Volume-weighted  
hypolimnetic DO  
(mg/L)

June-August Regression  
HODR = slope of the regression in mg/L/day

Date	Julian Day	8m- bottom	10m- bottom	15m- bottom
4/3/90	93	11.42	11.31	11.15
6/4/90	155	8.56	7.89	7.36
7/9/90	190	6.93	5.80	4.91
8/6/90	218	5.62	4.12	2.91
9/5/90	248	3.62	1.85	0.84
10/1/90	274	3.50	0.60	0.23
11/5/90	309	9.75	9.72	9.60
<div> <div>X-day (155-218), Y=8m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>15.810416</div> <div>0.0035569</div> <div>0.9999971</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X-day (155-218), Y=10m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>17.162684</div> <div>0.0035247</div> <div>0.9999983</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X-day (155-218), Y=15m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>18.299069</div> <div>0.020495</div> <div>0.9999576</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X Coefficient(s)</div> <div>Std Err of Coef.</div> <div>X Coefficient(s)</div> <div>Std Err of Coef.</div> </div> <div> <div>-0.046738</div> <div>7.968E-05</div> <div>-0.059811</div> <div>7.896E-05</div> </div> <div> <div>-0.070549</div> <div>0.0004591</div> </div>				
4/1/91	91	11.73	11.73	11.70
6/3/91	154	8.94	8.29	7.74
7/1/91	182	7.42	6.51	5.21
8/5/91	217	5.20	3.54	2.54
9/3/91	246	4.52	2.54	0.61
10/7/91	280	4.35	1.81	0.43
11/4/91	308	8.71	8.80	7.90
<div> <div>X-day (154-217), Y=8m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>18.159539</div> <div>0.117406</div> <div>0.9980523</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X-day (154-217), Y=10m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>20.089074</div> <div>0.2707036</div> <div>0.995941</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X-day (154-217), Y=15m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>20.321644</div> <div>0.1753532</div> <div>0.9977224</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X Coefficient(s)</div> <div>Std Err of Coef.</div> <div>X Coefficient(s)</div> <div>Std Err of Coef.</div> </div> <div> <div>-0.059537</div> <div>0.0026301</div> <div>-0.075605</div> <div>0.0060642</div> </div> <div> <div>-0.082232</div> <div>0.0039289</div> </div>				
4/7/92	98	10.24	9.95	9.62
6/2/92	154	7.84	6.81	5.91
7/6/92	188	6.75	5.17	3.97
8/3/92	216	3.78	2.02	1.37
8/31/92	244	3.47	2.63	0.88
10/5/92	279	5.60	4.03	0.48
<div> <div>X-day (154-216), Y=8m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>18.091298</div> <div>0.924699</div> <div>0.9025491</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X-day (154-216), Y=10m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>18.864463</div> <div>0.8067237</div> <div>0.9452315</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X-day (154-216), Y=15m-bottom</div> <div>Regression Output:</div> <div> <div>Constant</div> <div>Std Err of Y Est</div> <div>R Squared</div> <div>No. of Observations</div> <div>Degrees of Freedom</div> </div> <div> <div>17.248887</div> <div>0.449371</div> <div>0.9805002</div> <div>3</div> <div>1</div> </div> </div>				
<div> <div>X Coefficient(s)</div> <div>Std Err of Coef.</div> <div>X Coefficient(s)</div> <div>Std Err of Coef.</div> </div> <div> <div>-0.064351</div> <div>0.0211453</div> <div>-0.076326</div> <div>0.0183726</div> </div> <div> <div>-0.072571</div> <div>0.0102341</div> </div>				

# Appendix A (continued).

Volume-weighted  
hypolimnetic DO  
(mg/L)

June-August Regression  
HODR = slope of the regression in mg/Uday

Date	Julian Day	8m: bottom:	10m: bottom:	15m: bottom:	X=day (156-214), Y=8m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (156-214), Y=10m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (156-214), Y=15m-bottom Regression Output:
5/2/94	123	10.15	9.72	9.27	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom
6/7/94	158	7.90	6.85	5.75	18.95041 0.1910573 0.9952037 3 1	21.894208 0.3355586 0.9918053 3 1	21.338876 0.0615686 0.999751 3 1
7/6/94	187	6.12	4.53	2.97			
8/2/94	214	4.01	1.56	0.23			
9/6/94	249	2.27	0.03	0.00			
10/4/94	277	3.96	1.81	0.04			
					X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.
					-0.069486 0.0048239	-0.094341 0.0085733	-0.098495 0.0015545

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Date	Julian Day	8m: bottom:	10m: bottom:	15m: bottom:	X=day (156-213), Y=8m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (156-213), Y=10m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (156-213), Y=15m-bottom Regression Output:
5/2/95	122	10.44	10.10	9.47	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom
6/8/95	159	9.05	7.94	6.44	20.811682 0.2058245 0.9946402 3 1	22.003145 0.1526556 0.9979418 3 1	21.491678 0.1911938 0.9971811 3 1
7/5/95	186	7.32	5.75	4.13			
8/1/95	213	5.09	3.19	1.35			
9/11/95	254	3.13	0.73	0.06			
10/3/95	276	3.67	1.51	0.04			
					X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.
					-0.07343 0.0053904	-0.088039 0.0039882	-0.094177 0.0050072

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Date	Julian Day	8m: bottom:	10m: bottom:	15m: bottom:	X=day (156-219), Y=8m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (156-219), Y=10m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (156-219), Y=15m-bottom Regression Output:
5/7/96	128	10.54	10.34	9.92	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom
6/4/96	156	8.74	8.18	7.65	17.811874 0.3598358 0.9865915 3 1	21.321675 0.2258558 0.9963579 3 1	23.511811 0.1985215 0.998729 3 1
7/9/96	191	7.16	5.52	4.34			
8/6/96	219	5.10	2.88	1.26			
9/10/96	254	3.46	0.84	0.18			
10/8/96	282	4.76	2.58	0.20			
					X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.
					-0.057313 0.0086632	-0.083721 0.0050618	-0.101209 0.0044472

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Date	Julian Day	8m: bottom:	10m: bottom:	15m: bottom:	X=day (161-225), Y=8m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (161-225), Y=10m-bottom Regression Output:	X=day (161-225), Y=15m-bottom Regression Output:
5/15/97	135	11.18	10.94	10.27	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom	Constant Std Err of Y Est R Squared No. of Observations Degrees of Freedom
6/10/97	161	7.89	7.11	6.26	17.539567 0.167347 0.9961626 3 1	20.463138 0.4052326 0.9882321 3 1	20.616816 0.0671771 0.9987225 3 1
7/14/97	195	6.07	4.80	3.31			
8/13/97	225	4.07	1.84	0.55			
9/10/97	253	2.26	0.75	0.41			
					X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.	X Coefficient(s) Std Err of Coef.
					-0.059541 0.0036955	-0.082004 0.0088486	-0.089042 0.0014835

## Appendix A (continued).

Year	HODR mg/m <sup>2</sup> /day			1983-1987 trend in HODR									
	8m-8	10m-8	15m-8	X-yr (1983-97), Y=lin HODR (mg/m <sup>2</sup> /d)	Regression Output:	X-yr (1983-97), Y=lin HODR (mg/m <sup>2</sup> /d)	Regression Output:	X-yr (1983-87), Y=lin HODR (mg/m <sup>2</sup> /d)	Regression Output:	X-yr (1983-87), Y=lin HODR (mg/m <sup>2</sup> /d)	Regression Output:		
1983	194	215	302	Constant	-17478.33	Constant	-23884.25	Constant	-12084.31	Constant	-12084.31		
1984	325	332	482	Std Err of Y Est	60.09312	Std Err of Y Est	40.743335	Std Err of Y Est	51.191005	Std Err of Y Est	51.191005		
1985	330	382	462	R Squared	0.3453288	R Squared	0.5876556	R Squared	0.2833411	R Squared	0.2833411		
1986	432	420	395	No. of Observations	11	No. of Observations	11	No. of Observations	11	No. of Observations	11		
1989	277	303	324	Degrees of Freedom	9	Degrees of Freedom	9	Degrees of Freedom	9	Degrees of Freedom	9		
1991	352	383	377	X Coefficient(s)	8.954496 mg/m <sup>2</sup> /dyr	X Coefficient(s)	12.186613 mg/m <sup>2</sup> /dyr	X Coefficient(s)	6.272563 mg/m <sup>2</sup> /dyr	X Coefficient(s)	6.272563 mg/m <sup>2</sup> /dyr		
1992	353	382	333	Std Err of Conf.	4.1097468	Std Err of Conf.	3.403313	Std Err of Conf.	3.4974028	Std Err of Conf.	3.4974028		
1994	412	477	452	t-statistic	2.179	t-statistic	3.581	t-statistic	1.794	t-statistic	1.794		
1995	435	445	432	2-tail significance:	0.06	2-tail significance:	0.01	2-tail significance:	0.11	2-tail significance:	0.11		
1996	340	424	465	1-tail significance:	0.03	1-tail significance:	0.00	1-tail significance:	0.05	1-tail significance:	0.05		
1997	353	415	409										
1983-97	348	381	395										
mean	70	73	57										
deviation													